

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 2, 2007

The Honorable Michael Johanns
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns:

We are writing to express our concern with USDA's proposal to expand live cattle and beef trade with Canada. Your proposed rule published on January 9, 2007 would permit the importation of live Canadian cattle born after March 1, 1999 and beef from animals of any age. We, and the cattle ranchers we represent, believe expanding imports of Canadian livestock and beef will have serious repercussions for the American cattle industry, and we urge you to withdraw the proposal.

Increasing U.S. imports of Canadian cattle and beef at this time would have a significant negative impact on the economic well-being of American cattle producers and could seriously disrupt our efforts to expand U.S. beef exports overseas.

USDA has, in the past, underestimated the financial impact on American cattle producers of increased Canadian beef imports. In the months immediately following the implementation of USDA's 2005 Final Rule, which allowed the importation of live Canadian cattle less than 30 months of age, prices for U.S. fed cattle dropped nearly three times more than USDA had anticipated. American ranchers, who have already experienced a severe summer drought, punishing winter snowstorms, and rising feed prices, should not have to endure another such drop in cattle prices.

Furthermore, expanding Canadian cattle imports increases the possibility that a future case of BSE in a Canadian animal may be found in the United States. Three of Canada's nine BSE cases occurred in cattle born long after the March 1, 1999 date proposed in the rule as an appropriate age for importation. There is a very real possibility that USDA's proposal would lead to the importation of additional BSE-infected animals from Canada, which would destroy years of hard work by the American cattle industry, the Administration, and Congress to restore the confidence of our trading partners in the safety of American beef.

American beef is the healthiest and safest in the world, which is why USDA goes to great lengths to assure our trading partners that they will receive only American beef when they allow imports from the U.S. If older Canadian animals and beef from animals of any age enter our beef supply, it will make it harder for our trading partners to accept those assurances, and the already challenging work of regaining our lost export markets will be made even more difficult.

Consumers in foreign countries should not be the only ones receiving assurances from the U.S. government about the origin of their beef. Surely, American consumers deserve the same assurances from USDA that overseas consumers receive. If you will not withdraw your proposal to expand Canadian beef imports, then at the very least it should be postponed until USDA can fully implement mandatory Country-of-Origin labeling, as directed in the 2002 Farm Bill. Before American beef is commingled with beef from a country that discovered five cases of BSE last year, American consumers should be given basic tools with which to distinguish American beef from Canadian.

Sincerely,

Byron L. Dyer

Michael B. Enji

John V. Lue